Picture this. It is the middle of the third century, around the year 250 to 262 AD. A deadly epidemic called the Plague of Cyprian is raging across the Roman Empire. Many epidemiologists speculate it was an outbreak of Ebola. One of the hardest hit cities is Carthage in North Africa. Bodies are piling up in the streets, and panic fills the air. Many people who do not follow Christ abandon their own sick family members and flee the city in terror to save themselves.

In this time of crisis, the Christian church responds in a completely different way. Cyprian, who served as the bishop of Carthage and a respected Christian leader, gathers the church and calls them to action. The richer members donate money and food supplies. Healthy Christians, including those who are poor, risk their own lives to nurse the sick. They feed them, bathe them, provide comfort, and give proper burial to those who die. They extend this care not only to other Christians but also to their pagan neighbors who have no one else to help them.

A Christian bishop named Dionysius from Alexandria recorded similar actions in his city. He described how believers took charge of the sick, attended to their every need, and served without thinking of the danger to themselves. Many of these caregivers caught the disease and died as a result.

Through this coordinated effort, thousands of lives were saved. Many non-Christians were so moved by this genuine love and sacrifice that they turned to faith in Jesus Christ. Even though Christians faced persecution at the time, the church grew rapidly as people saw the power of their united compassion.

This is a powerful example of the church functioning as the body of Christ. Different members used their different gifts and resources to work together toward one common goal, showing the compassion of Jesus to a hurting world.

Section I: Why the Body of Christ Is Important – The Mechanics Most Preachers Skip

Friends, that third-century story of the church in Carthage during the Plague of Cyprian shows believers working together in a coordinated way. Rich members gave resources, healthy members nursed the sick, and the whole group cared for pagan neighbors too. Lives were saved and the gospel spread because the church functioned as a living body. But why does this matter so much? Many preachers tell us the Body of Christ is important, yet they rarely explain the actual mechanics of why it is important. Today we will walk through those mechanics step by step so this becomes practical, not just

inspirational.

The Body of Christ is important because it is how God accomplishes most of His purposes on earth. We keep hoping for dramatic miracles to fix everything, yet the Bible shows that God usually works through His people in coordinated action. This is not a backup plan. It is the main plan.

Why does God use mankind to fulfill His purposes? It is because God has no choice but to work with mankind to defeat Satan and bring the second coming of Christ. The foundation for this goes all the way back to Genesis 1:26, which says, Then God said, Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth. This verse is the legal transfer of authority over the universe from God to mankind. God created human beings as an extension of His will right here on earth. We are a necessary part of how God's purposes move forward, and as rulers of this universe our participation is mandatory.

To understand why this legal framework matters so much, look at Satan's plans for victory over mankind. Satan's initial plan for victory was simple and direct. In Genesis 3:1-7 the serpent, who is Satan, deceives Adam and Eve into believing his words over God's Word. By doing this, humanity legally handed authority over the earth to Satan, as Jesus Himself acknowledges when Satan offers Him the kingdoms of the world in Luke 4:6 NASBS,

And the devil said to Him, "I will give You all this domain and its glory; for it has been handed over to me, and I give it to whomever I wish.

Satan's objective was to force God to destroy His own human rulers. God had already stated the law in Genesis 2:16-17 that disobedience would bring death. Satan hoped the fall would trigger that death penalty immediately, wiping out humanity and leaving him as the sole ruler of the universe. God thwarted Satan's plan by killing Adam and Eve in time. God kept his word but retained mankind to challenge Satan's authority. Satan still needed mankind destroyed, so his plan was to corrupt mankind so thoroughly that God would be forced to destroy His creations. This plan nearly succeeded as Satan corrupted humanity so thoroughly before the flood that God had to send the waters to judge the earth.

After the flood, God established the Noahic Covenant in Genesis 9:9-17, which includes the rainbow as a sign that He would never again destroy the earth with water. This covenant blocked Satan's initial plan of total destruction of mankind. So Satan shifted to a new plan for long-term victory. Since he could no longer force God to annihilate humanity outright, Satan now promotes self-

destruction through incessant human conflict and warfare throughout history. He works to turn people against each other so that we destroy ourselves from within. This is why we see cycles of violence, division, and evil in every generation. Satan knows that if he can keep humanity at war with itself, he can eventually destroy God's co-rulers and gain sole claim over the earth, without any other claimants.

This is the real battle behind the scenes. God designed the church as the Body of Christ precisely to counter Satan's schemes. When we participate together as the Body, we push back against self-destruction and extend God's will instead. The mechanics are clear: Genesis 1:26 gives us the authority, the Body of Christ gives us the structure, and active participation gives us the victory.

God calls all of us to participate actively in His kingdom. We are not meant to have our own private thing with God and skip the church. When we stay on the sidelines, we are actually refusing the role God assigned us in Genesis 1:26. The Body of Christ is the practical way we live out that calling every day.

Section II: The Body of Christ Metaphor – A Useful Tool for Understanding Roles and Mutual Dependencies

The apostle Paul gives us this picture in Romans 12:4, which says, For as we have many members in one body, but all the members do not have the same function. He develops it further in 1 Corinthians 12. Paul drew the imagery of the Body of Christ from popular Greek philosophy, especially Plato. For example, Plato wrote in The Complete Works of Plato on page 1000, To begin with, our several natures are not all alike but different. One man is naturally fitted for one task, and another for another. Paul adapted this familiar picture so his Greek and Roman listeners could understand it easily.

Under Genesis 1:26, human beings are allowed to create useful tools to understand and live out God's truth. The Body of Christ metaphor is exactly that kind of tool. It is not the core doctrine itself, but it helps us see our roles and mutual dependencies clearly. Here are the practical advantages, each explained so the mechanics are easy to grasp.

First, it combats division and individualism. In 1 Corinthians 12:25 Paul writes, that there should be no schism in the body, but that the members should have the same care for one another. When one part hurts, the whole body feels it. This stops us from living as isolated Christians who only care about our own spiritual life.

Second, it counters hierarchical elitism. In the ancient world, body metaphors

often put the elite or the head above everyone else. Paul flips the script. He says in 1 Corinthians 12:22-24, On the contrary, it is much truer that the members of the body which seem to be weaker are necessary, and those of the body which we deem less honorable, on these we bestow more abundant honor, and our less presentable members become much more presentable, whereas our more presentable members have no need of it. But God has so composed the body, giving more abundant honor to that member which lacked, so that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. This levels the playing field and reminds leaders they are not above the rest of the body.

Third, it promotes cohesion and communal action. Different members have different functions, yet they work as one. The Plague of Cyprian story we heard earlier is a living example. Rich believers supplied resources while others provided hands-on care. The result was coordinated mercy that no single person could have achieved alone. This is how the church fulfills its Genesis 1:26 calling as God's extension in the world.

The metaphor is a helpful tool Paul created under the authority of Genesis 1:26. It shows us how to function together instead of competing or coasting.

Section III: The Bride of Christ Metaphor – God's Perspective and the Seriousness with Which He Views the Church

While the Body of Christ shows us the human perspective of how the church functions, the Bride or Wife of Christ shows us God's perspective. This metaphor runs all through the Old Testament, where God calls Israel His bride, and it reaches its fulfillment in the New Testament where the church is the bride of Christ. It reveals the deep, covenant love God has for His people and the seriousness with which He views the stewardship of the church.

The metaphor shows how personally God takes the care of His church. Too many pastors, bishops, teachers, and leaders today steal from, abuse, or mistreat members of the church. They do not realize the harsh judgments that are coming. The church is the bride of Christ. Do you think you can punch Jesus' bride in the face and give her a black eye and think Jesus will not do anything about it?

Jesus Himself warns in Matthew 18:6-7,10 NASB, but whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to stumble, it would be better for him to have a heavy millstone hung around his neck, and to be drowned in the depth of the sea. Woe to the world because of its stumbling blocks! For it is inevitable that stumbling blocks come, but woe to that man through whom the stumbling block comes! See that you do not despise one of these little

ones, for I say to you that their angels in heaven continually see the face of My Father who is in heaven.

He repeats the warning in Matthew 24:48-51 NASB, But if that evil slave says in his heart, My master is not coming for a long time, and begins to beat his fellow slaves and eat and drink with drunkards, the master of that slave will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour which he does not know, and will cut him in pieces and assign him a place with the hypocrites, in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

In the early days of the church God demonstrated how seriously we are to take our responsibility in the church. To the point that even lying about your good intentions to the church is a serious offense against God. We see this in the story of Ananias and Sapphira in Acts 5:1-11 NASBS

But a man named Ananias, with his wife Sapphira, sold a piece of property, [2] and kept back some of the price for himself, with his wife's full knowledge, and bringing a portion of it, he laid it at the apostles' feet. [3] But Peter said, "Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep back some of the price of the land? [4] While it remained unsold, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, was it not under your control? Why is it that you have conceived this deed in your heart? You have not lied to men but to God." [5] And as he heard these words, Ananias fell down and breathed his last; and great fear came over all who heard of it. [6] The young men got up and covered him up, and after carrying him out, they buried him. [7] Now there elapsed an interval of about three hours, and his wife came in, not knowing what had happened. [8] And Peter responded to her, "Tell me whether you sold the land for such and such a price?" And she said, "Yes, that was the price." [9] Then Peter said to her, "Why is it that you have agreed together to put the Spirit of the Lord to the test? Behold, the feet of those who have buried your husband are at the door, and they will carry you out as well." [10] And immediately she fell at his feet and breathed her last, and the young men came in and found her dead, and they carried her out and buried her beside her husband. [11] And great fear came over the whole church, and over all who heard of these things.

These verses show how seriously God takes the stewardship of His bride. The Bride metaphor calls every leader to humility and love, and it calls every member to value the church as something precious to God Himself.

Every true believer is part of the Bride of Christ, and only Jesus decides who is and who is not married to Him. This means we should not have cross denominational hatred, mistreatment, and disunity. The majority of Catholics, Orthodox, and those from Protestant derived denominations are married to

Christ. Cross denominational conflict is therefore an attack on the Bride of Christ.

Jesus spoke strongly against division. In Matthew 12:25 NASB, He said, Knowing their thoughts, He said to them, Any kingdom divided against itself is laid waste, and any city or house divided against itself will not stand. In Mark 3:24-25 NASB, He declared, If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. And if a house is divided against itself, that house will not be able to stand. The same truth appears in Luke 11:17 NASB, Any kingdom divided against itself is laid waste, and a house divided against a house falls.

In His great prayer before the cross, Jesus asked the Father for unity among all who would believe in Him. In John 17:20-23 NASB, He prayed, I do not ask on behalf of these alone, but for those also who believe in Me through their word, that they may all be one, even as You, Father, are in Me and I in You, that they also may be in Us, so that the world may believe that You sent Me. The glory which You have given Me I have given to them, that they may be one, even as We are one, I in them and You in Me, that they may be perfected in unity, so that the world may know that You sent Me, and loved them, even as You have loved Me.

The apostle Paul also confronted division in the early church. In 1 Corinthians 1:11-13 NASB, he wrote, For I have been informed concerning you, my brethren, by Chloe's people, that there are quarrels among you. Now I mean this, that each one of you is saying, I am of Paul, and I am of Apollos, and I am of Cephas, and I am of Christ. Has Christ been divided? Paul was not crucified for you, was he? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?

When we fight and mistreat other Christians across denominational lines, we are attacking the very Bride that Jesus loves and will one day present to Himself in splendor. This is why the two metaphors belong together. The Body of Christ calls us to function together with different gifts and roles. The Bride of Christ calls us to love and protect every part of the church because she belongs to Jesus Himself.

Section IV: Bringing the Two Metaphors Together – What This Means for Us Today

When we hold the Body of Christ and the Bride of Christ together, we see the full picture. The Body of Christ gives us the mechanics of participation, roles, and coordinated action under Genesis 1:26. The Bride of Christ reminds us of the love and the accountability that motivate everything we do. God designed the church this way because He has no other framework for extending His will

on earth.

This combination fulfills God’s original plan from creation. Genesis 1:26 established human beings as co-rulers and the extension of God’s will. The Body of Christ shows us how to live out that role through mutual dependence and service, while the Bride of Christ shows us that this role flows from God’s deep covenant love and carries serious accountability.

On the practical side, it moves us from private faith to active partnership. Many people today treat their relationship with God as a personal matter only. The two metaphors together call us to step into the church as a functioning body and as a cherished bride, so our faith becomes lived out in community instead of staying isolated.

From the missional angle, coordinated bodies under a loving Bridegroom reach the world more effectively than isolated individuals. The Plague of Cyprian story we heard at the beginning of this message is a clear example. Believers worked together with different gifts, rich and poor, healthy and weak, to care for the sick and bury the dead. That coordinated action saved lives and drew many to Christ. When the church functions as the Body while remembering it is the Bride, the same kind of impact happens today.

On the personal level, each of us has a place and a responsibility. The Body metaphor shows us that our gifts matter and that we are needed. The Bride metaphor shows us that God treasures every member and will hold leaders and members accountable for how we treat one another. Right now, ask yourself: Am I actively using my gifts in the Body? Am I treating other believers with the care that belongs to Christ’s bride? If the early church could coordinate sacrificial care during a deadly plague, we can coordinate love, service, and unity in our own time.

Section V: What Is NOT the Mission of the Church: Speculating and Trying to Fulfill Eschatology

One of the clearest ways the church can lose focus is by turning its energy toward speculating about the end times or trying to force prophecy to come true. This is not the mission of the church. The Book of Acts shows us the actual purposes God gave the early believers: to be witnesses for Jesus to the ends of the earth, to proclaim repentance and forgiveness, to make disciples, to teach and equip the faith, to live in unity and care for one another, to help the poor and needy, to plant and strengthen local churches, to demonstrate the power of the kingdom, to pray continually, and to take the gospel to every nation and culture. None of those purposes include guessing dates for Christ’s return or trying to hurry along events in the Middle East.

The Bible is very clear that we are not supposed to know the timing of the end. In Matthew 24:36-39,42,44 NASB Jesus says, But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father alone. For the coming of the Son of Man will be just like the days of Noah. For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and they did not understand until the flood came and took them all away, so will the coming of the Son of Man be. Therefore be on the alert, for you do not know which day your Lord is coming. But be sure of this, that if the head of the house had known at what time of the night the thief was coming, he would have been on the alert and would not have allowed his house to be broken into. For this reason you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour when you do not think He will.

Jesus repeats the warning in Matthew 24:23 NASB, Then if anyone says to you, Behold, here is the Christ, or There He is, do not believe him.

When the disciples asked Jesus about restoring the kingdom to Israel right before He ascended, He gave them the same answer. In Acts 1:6-8 NASB we read, So when they had come together, they were asking Him, saying, Lord, is it at this time You are restoring the kingdom to Israel? He said to them, It is not for you to know times or epochs which the Father has fixed by His own authority, but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth.

The church’s job is to stay alert, live godly lives, and fulfill the mission in Acts. It is not to guess signs or try to speed up prophecy. When we do that, we make decisions based on illusionary foundations instead of clear biblical commands.
History shows how dangerous this speculation can be. Every generation for two thousand years has thought it would see the end times, yet every prediction has failed. People have abandoned responsibility, sold possessions, or even harmed others in the name of “fulfilling prophecy.” The same error happens today. In our zeal to see certain events in Israel as signs of the end, some parts of the church have stayed silent or even supported actions that hurt fellow Christians.

Recent events make this painfully clear. In the ongoing conflict, Israeli forces have attacked churches in Gaza and Lebanon. All three major Christian churches in Gaza, Baptist, Catholic, and Orthodox, have been bombed while people sought shelter there. The Al-Ahli Arab Hospital, run by the Episcopal Church, was struck and left operating at only thirty percent capacity before

being forced to shut down. In Lebanon and Syria, similar violence has endangered Christian communities, sometimes leaving believers exposed to terrorist groups. When the church fails to speak clearly against these acts because it believes prophecy is being fulfilled, it treats the Body of Christ as expendable. This is exactly the kind of decision that comes from an illusionary foundation instead of the plain mission in Acts.

The mission of the church is not to speculate about the end or to try to make prophecy happen. We do not know when Jesus' return will be. When Jesus came out of the wilderness a key phrase that Jesus said in Mark 1:15 NASBS was
"The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.". Time is a price that has to be paid for Christ's return. Whatever the required time is, we can't speed it up. Our mission is to live as the functioning Body of Christ and the cherished Bride of Christ, carrying out the clear purposes God gave us in the Book of Acts. When we stay focused there, we honor Jesus' own words and avoid the trap of division and misplaced priorities.

Section VI: The Mission of the Church According to the Book of Acts.

The Book of Acts records the birth and early life of the church after Pentecost. It is not just history; it is the inspired pattern of how the church is supposed to function in the world. Each purpose below comes directly from the text, with the full verse quoted from the New American Standard Bible. I explain each one simply so anyone new to the Bible can understand exactly what it means and how it works in practice.

1. To be witnesses for Jesus to the ends of the earth

Acts 1:8 NASB says, "but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth."This is the foundational mission statement. The church does not exist only for itself. It exists to tell the story of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection everywhere, starting locally and reaching globally. The early believers did this by sharing their personal stories of Jesus and the message of the gospel in every city they entered.

2. To proclaim repentance and forgiveness of sins through Jesus

Peter's sermon on the day of Pentecost is the model. Acts 2:38 NASB says, "Peter said to them, Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy

Spirit.”The church’s message is simple and urgent: turn from sin and trust Jesus for forgiveness. This proclamation happened in public squares, homes, and synagogues throughout Acts. It is still the central mission today.

3. To make disciples and baptize new believers

After Peter preached, Acts 2:41 NASB records, “So then, those who had received his word were baptized; and that day there were added about three thousand souls.”The church does not stop at preaching. It brings people into the family of God through baptism and then teaches them to follow Jesus. This pattern repeats in every city Paul visits.

4. To teach and equip believers in the faith

Acts 2:42 NASB says, “They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.” The church gathers regularly to learn Scripture, pray, and grow. Later Paul tells the Ephesian elders in Acts 20:20 NASB, “how I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, and teaching you publicly and from house to house.” Teaching is not optional; it equips the Body to live out its mission.

5. To live in unity, fellowship, and mutual care

Acts 4:32 NASB describes the result: “And the congregation of those who believed were of one heart and soul; and not one of them claimed that anything belonging to him was his own, but all things were common property to them.”The church shows the world what God’s kingdom looks like by loving one another and sharing resources. This unity is not just emotional; it is practical and visible.

6. To care for the needs of the community

When a problem arose with food distribution, the apostles appointed deacons so the ministry could continue. Acts 6:1-3 NASB explains the issue and the solution: “Now at this time while the disciples were increasing in number, a complaint arose on the part of the Hellenistic Jews against the Hebraic Jews, because their widows were being overlooked in the daily serving of food. So the twelve summoned the congregation of the disciples and said, It is not desirable for us to neglect the word of God in order to serve tables. Therefore, brethren, select from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may put in charge of this task.”The church organized itself to meet practical needs so the word of God could keep spreading. Mercy ministry is part of the mission.

7. To plant and strengthen local churches

Paul and Barnabas returned to each new city and “appointed elders for them in every church” (Acts 14:23 NASB). The mission included establishing healthy, self-sustaining congregations everywhere they went.

8. To demonstrate the power of the kingdom through signs and wonders

Acts 2:43 NASB notes, “Everyone kept feeling a sense of awe; and many wonders and signs were taking place through the apostles.”Miracles were not the main goal, but they confirmed the message and showed that God’s kingdom had arrived in power.

9. To pray continually and be led the Holy Spirit

The church was born in prayer (Acts 1:14) and kept praying. When they prayed, the place was shaken and they were filled with the Holy Spirit (Acts 4:31). Every major decision, from choosing leaders to sending missionaries, began with prayer and the leading of the Spirit (Acts 13:2-3).

10. To take the gospel to every nation and culture

The book of Acts ends with Paul preaching in Rome, the capital of the empire. The mission that started in Jerusalem reached the known world. The church’s purpose is global expansion until Jesus returns.

These ten purposes are not suggestions; they are the living pattern the Holy Spirit gave the early church in the Book of Acts. When the church lives them out together as the Body of Christ and remembers it is the Bride of Christ, it fulfills the Great Commission and pushes back against Satan’s plans. This list can be used directly in any sermon section that needs a clear picture of the church’s mission. If you want me to weave any of these into a specific part of our outline, just say the word.